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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 001337

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ INVESTIGATION INTO SAIPOV KILLING CONTINUES

REF: A. BISHKEK 1320

[1](#)B. TASHKENT 1896

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Kyrgyz law enforcement investigation continues into the October 24 killing of journalist Alisher Saipov. The two most popular theories place blame either on the Uzbek security services or on Islamic extremist organizations Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) or the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The Kyrgyz Ministry of Interior's (MVD) official line is that it is pursuing all theories, but MVD officers appear to be leaking information about the investigation purporting to tie Saipov to extremist Islamic organizations. GKNB Chairman Sutalinov told the Ambassador that Saipov had a large number of IMU and HT contacts in his computer files, and investigators were focusing on these connections. Kyrgyz police and security service personnel are also reportedly pulling in journalists in the Osh area for questioning and threatening some with criminal prosecution over their press coverage of the murder. END SUMMARY.

Journalists Demand Greater Protection

[1](#)2. (SBU) Kyrgyz journalists and civil society leaders continue to point the finger at the Uzbek security services, and Saipov's murder has prompted calls for greater protection for journalists. Over 100 journalists and human rights activists demonstrated in front of MVD headquarters in Bishkek October 26, demanding a swift and transparent investigation into Saipov's murder. Later that day at a roundtable discussion, journalists and activists spoke about the risks taken by human rights defenders. Most speculated that the Uzbek security services were behind Saipov's murder, and they decried the lack of protection by Kyrgyz authorities against threats posed by Uzbek security services operating within Kyrgyzstan.

13. (SBU) During another civil society forum October 31, journalists and activists raised concerns about recent beatings of journalists and the assassination of Saipov, and they complained that harassment of civil society and the press has increased beyond that seen during the Akayev years. One presenter claimed that every journalist in Osh Oblast had a "kurator" in the security services who regularly inquires about journalists' contacts. The forum drafted a petition to President Bakiyev demanding greater protection for journalists and activists.

Suspicion about U.S. Support

14. (C) GKNB Chairman Murat Sutalinov told the Ambassador October 30 that investigators had found a large number of HT and IMU contacts listed in Saipov's computer. Sutalinov said that MVD investigators were now focusing their attention on these connections.

15. (C) On October 31, Deputy Foreign Minister Taalay Kydyrov raised Saipov's alleged connections to these extremist organizations and asked the Ambassador whether it was true that the U.S. government had been funding him. (Note: Saipov's Valley Media Group received a grant of \$26,500 in 2007 from the National Endowment for Democracy to support the Uzbek-language newspaper Siyosat. End Note.) Kydyrov said that U.S. support for Saipov was the sort of thing that created suspicion among some in the Kyrgyz government about U.S. intentions in the country, and it had fueled concerns over U.S. democracy programs generally.

MVD: Following All Leads

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16. (C) The MVD's official line is that it is continuing to investigate all theories, and MVD has released very little official information about the case. Press reports citing unnamed MVD officials claimed that the police had "established who killed Saipov" and begun a nationwide manhunt, and that MVD had linked the "three suspects" to HT. Similar reports from AKIpress stated that ballistics experts matched the 9mm bullet casings found at the scene of the shooting with those found at other crime scenes. Reuters quoted MVD spokesman Bakyt Seyitov acknowledging "the possibility of involvement of Uzbek security services" because of Saipov's criticism of Karimov, but Interfax cited Osh MVD official, Zamir Sadykov, as saying "there is no proof or reason to believe that Uzbekistan's secret services were involved." MVD's press office told us that any comments alleging Uzbek government, HT, or IMU involvement, were merely "personal views" and "not the official line of the MVD."

MVD Leaks to Press Tie Saipov to Extremists

17. (C) Despite the official line, MVD officers appear to be leaking selective information about the investigation, including information about Saipov's alleged ties to Islamic extremist organizations such as HT and the IMU, as well as information about Saipov's political activities. An October 31 AKIpress article quoted unnamed MVD officials alleging that Saipov received funding from Islamic extremist groups and from the Uzbek opposition party Erk. According to the article, leaders of HT admitted to having close ties with Saipov and "being interviewed by him about activities of the party." The article also said that Saipov had harbored the alleged leader of Andijon events, Kabul Parpiev, in his home and had helped him escape to Kazakhstan.

18. (C) Police reportedly searched Saipov's office and apartment and found anti-Karimov leaflets, HT brochures and

files on his computer, and Uzbek opposition newspapers. According to investigators, ethnic Uzbek/UK national journalist Shahida Tulaganova delivered anti-Karimov leaflets, large sums of money, and other Erk party materials on several occasions to Saipov in Osh. Officials stated that these items were sent by exiled Erk party leader Muhammad Solikh. (Note: Tulaganova told us that she had, in fact, delivered a bag of Erk party materials to Saipov, and she acknowledged this to MVD investigators when they questioned her. End Note.) Investigators sealed off Saipov's office and confiscated computers and mobile phones.

¶9. (SBU) Journalists and civil society leaders expressed fear that Saipov's list of contacts would be passed by Kyrgyz authorities to their Uzbek counterparts. Other press reports, including the ferghana.ru website, accused the Kyrgyz government of trying to smear Saipov by linking him to extremist organizations.

Investigators Question Journalists

¶10. (C) In Osh, Kyrgyz police and security service personnel are reportedly questioning journalists in connection with Saipov's murder. The manager of the Osh Media Resource Center (MRC), Maksuda Aitiyeva, contacted the Embassy October 30 to request legal assistance for journalists set to be questioned by the Kyrgyz authorities. Aitiyeva said that a large portion of the MRC's 205 registered journalists were being called in for questioning by the MVD and GKNB. Those already questioned had complained of rude and intimidating treatment, and investigators reportedly threatened to arrest the MRC office manager for sharing information about Saipov to unauthorized persons. MVD officials also reportedly threatened to prosecute staff of Mezon TV, a local station in

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Osh, for airing a commemoration show about Saipov. (Note: In partnership with the OSCE Center in Bishkek, the Embassy immediately provided a grant to the MRC to hire a lawyer to conduct trainings for journalists to explain their rights under questioning as well as legal advice about for what they could be prosecuted for reporting under Kyrgyz law. End Note.)

Comment

¶11. (C) Senior Kyrgyz officials have been relatively quiet about Saipov's murder. Aside from rude comments from State Secretary Madumarov (amounting to "journalists are shot in

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many countries; why all the fuss?"), and Ombudsman Bakir uluu (who said that Saipov may have been killed by the security services of another country), other officials haven't commented publicly. While the press is filled with stories (and sometimes wild speculation) about the case, the official government news agency, Kabar, has put out only one article.

¶12. (C) Saipov's murder has alarmed journalists and civil society activists, who fear for their own safety. It is an open secret that the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border is easily crossed in many places, and GKNB Chairman Sutalinov openly acknowledged this to Ambassador. Many activists suspect that Uzbek security services have previously carried out operations on the Kyrgyz side of the border (with or without the cooperation of Kyrgyz officials), but Saipov's murder has brought these concerns out in the open. Saipov had connections to extremist groups (he openly reported on these groups), but the MVD leaks and Sutalinov's comments seem designed to paint a more sinister connection. It is not clear, at this point, where the investigation ultimately will lead. However, with an already difficult relationship between the two countries, sensitive elections in December in both countries, and upcoming gas negotiations, there is

concern that a political decision not to rock the boat will lead to a manufactured result. And, Kydyrov's comments make clear that the Kyrgyz government could use the case as a reason to push for greater scrutiny of U.S. democracy programming.

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